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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003684

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SUBJECT: KURD TERRITORIAL AMBITIONS AND PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

Classified By: Ninewa Provincial PRT Leader James Knight: 1.4 (B) and (D).

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Kurd political leadership in Ninewa are focused on reintegrating districts in Ninewa formerly part of Kurd-dominated provinces into the KRG, through referenda per Article 140 of the current GOI Constitution. This process as Kurds envision it would postpone new provincial elections -- now expected no later than March 2007 -- to late 2007 or ¶2008. Both accelerated district referenda and postponed elections risk confidence in the electoral process and exacerbation of widespread fear of Kurdish encroachment among Sunnis and Ninewa's many minorities. End summary.

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Back to the old borders of Kurdistan . . .  
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¶2. (C) As recent Ninewa reporting has consistently documented, Ninewa's Sunnis and minorities are sharply fearful of Kurd intentions to integrate parts of Ninewa into the KRG. Although local Kurdish political parties denied such ambitions in July and early August meetings with PRT Team Leader Knight, recent discussions with ranking KRG authorities and the Ninewa Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) Chair (and Provincial Vice-Governor) have tilted toward resolution of 'disputed territories' before further provincial elections.

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. . . in three steps . . .  
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¶3. (C) In a 7 Sep Team Leader discussion with KRG Minister for Extra-Regional Relations Ihsan and a similar discussion with KRG Minister of State for the Interior Sinjari 9 Sep, both insisted that resolution of disputed territories should be completed before provincial elections. In Ninewa those territories include Makhmur, Sinjar, Shikhan, and Zumar districts. In discussion with Ninewa Vice-Governor (and Provincial KDP Chair) Goran 13 and 21 Sep, he echoed these views with precision. When queried further, all three indicated that the process should include three steps --

'normalization', a census, and referenda in each district -- which must be completed before provincial elections take place.

14. (C) All three defined 'normalization' as the return of Kurds displaced or resettled during Saddam's Arabization and anti-Kurd campaigns to their home towns and villages. Sinjari was the most poignant, describing in detail the eviction of his family from Sinjar in the 1970s after they refused to register as Arabs. Despite repeated queries during these discussions, none consider this process problematic; Goran insists that in Ninewa the process is already nearly complete.

15. (C) The three anticipate the necessary census in 2007, in view of the decennial national Iraq census already expected next year. Referenda on incorporation of the disputed areas into the provinces now constituting the Kurdistan Regional Government would follow late in 2007. In his conversation with PRT Leader Knight on 21 Sep, Goran displayed a map of Iraqi Kurdistan that, in his view, would generally match the boundaries of the post-referenda KRG. That map (clipped from a Kurdish newspaper article reporting on Article 140 negotiations) shows most of northern and eastern Ninewa, all of Tamim, and parts of Diyala added to the KRG.

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. . . despite Arab and minority alarm  
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16. (C) Ninewa Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) Chair Dr. Mohammad Shaker and two senior IIP staff met PRT Leader Knight 25 Sep at PRT offices on IIP's urgent request. The meeting was scheduled by the IIP specifically to convey alarm at the increasing pace of Kurdish encroachment in Ninewa and the prospect of delayed Provincial elections. Dr. Mohammad emphasized that KRG expansionism continues to feed fear and may lead to violence from Ninewa's Sunni and minorities -- especially if the districts that are the focus of KRG efforts to extend its hegemony are 'annexed' and if the resolution process significantly delays elections.

17. (C) Dr. Mohammad attributes much recent violence in Ninewa -- notably in Tal'Afar -- to Kurd pressure for incorporation into the KRG. He underscored that referenda and provincial realignment of heavily Kurdish districts part of Ninewa are acceptable, but only after new Provincial elections and entry into force of national federalism legislation now before the Council of Representatives. To maintain confidence and reduce tension in Ninewa, he asked that the USG issue a statement affirming its commitment to the CPA decree of 9 Apr 2003 declaring that provincial boundaries in effect that date would be maintained.

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Comment  
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18. (C) This KRG effort already has had significant implications for Ninewa. As IIP concerns underline, this effort already feeds rampant Sunni and minority fears of Kurdish encroachment. Dr. Mohammad is an authoritative spokesman for most of Ninewa's Sunnis, and in this regard echoes minority fears as well. PRT staff are regularly reminded that Kurd ambitions to carve off parts of Ninewa are likely to inflame

violence. In particular, some Sunnis originally resettled in Ninewa under Saddam's Arabization programs are now approaching two generations of residence in Ninewa, and would likely become internally-displaced persons (IDPs) elsewhere in Iraq if forced out -- despite Kurds' blithe indifference to the practical consequences of 'normalization'.

19. (C) Comment continued. This effort will also dilute the currently general commitment to democratic processes now evident across Ninewa's political spectrum as it progresses, especially since it will significantly delay new provincial elections that will overturn current Kurdish party control of Ninewa's Provincial government. Ninewa's Sunnis have consistently pressed for early provincial elections to redress their error in boycotting the January 2005 vote. Similarly, opinion leaders of Ninewa's minorities (including Christians of several varieties, Yezidis, Shabaks, and Turcomans) have equally consistently called for early elections to overcome their currently limited Provincial representation, which they attribute to vote-rigging by Kurds in 2005. This eagerness to vote demonstrates Sunni commitment to the electoral process at the provincial level despite their 2005 boycott -- a critical PRT accomplishment. Delaying provincial elections for what may be another full year poses grave risks to that commitment. End comment.  
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